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NEW YORK TIMES
20 July 1982

British Called Tight-Lipped On Details of Espionage Case

By LESLIE H. GELB
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 19 — United States intelligence officials said today that the British Government had not provided American officials with any details about an espionage case involving top secret communications intelligence.

"We simply don't know what's going on," one high-level intelligence officer said. "The British are being tight-lipped about it all, perhaps not to jeopardize prosecution."

Reagan Administration officials said that all they had heard from the British so far was that they had arrested a man named Geoffrey Arthur Prime, a taxi driver, who apparently had worked in the Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham.

The headquarters is the hub of the British intelligence communications network and is responsible for sending intelligence communications and monitoring messages and communications to and from foreign countries. It performs functions similar to those of the National Security Agency in the United States.

Mr. Prime was arraigned last Thursday on an espionage charge described by the British prosecutor as "of the gravest possible nature."

Administration intelligence officials said that so far as they know, Mr. Prime was employed by the British communications agency until 1975. The formal charges against Mr. Prime, however, cite conduct by him "prejudicial to the safety and interests of the state" that "might be, or was intended to be, directly or indirectly useful to the enemy," from Jan. 1, 1968 to Dec. 31, 1981.

The Administration officials con-



United Press International

Geoffrey Arthur Prime in custody
near London on espionage charges.

cluded from this that other British intelligence workers were probably involved in the suspected espionage.

Mrs. Thatcher to Make Statement

Special to The New York Times

LONDON, July 19 — Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher plans to make a statement in the House of Commons on Tuesday in response to reports that a major new spy scandal is about to be disclosed.

Since Friday, fears have been growing among members of Parliament that security at the Government's communications headquarters at Cheltenham has been seriously breached.